

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Regional Sociological Research Experience



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Abstract. The article presents the experience of the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS in conducting sociological research on the territory of the Vologda Oblast and the Northwestern Federal District. It describes the historical aspects of formation of the system for public opinion monitoring and examines its theoretical and methodological foundations. The author of the article analyzes the structure of monitoring indicators and provides a brief interpretation of research findings that reflect social well-being and social perception trends. In addition, the paper analyzes people's attitude toward the activities of federal and regional authorities, trends in social well-being, consumer sentiment and also the complex indicator – the index of public sentiment in the region – developed by ISED T RAS researchers. The results of sociological studies carried out at ISED T RAS correlate with the dynamics of the all-Russian public opinion polls conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), Levada-Center, etc. They indicate that Russian society gradually adapts to new conditions of life after the collapse of the USSR. Besides, opinion polls show the most important features of the post-Soviet Russian history at its present stage; they are associated with the intensification of international political relations, the consequences of the “Crimean spring” and the new challenges Russia's economy is facing now. The article concludes that as global community, of which Russian society is part, is evolving, sociological knowledge begins to play an increasingly important role in administration and national security; this is associated with the greater importance attached to intangible development factors. Therefore, a necessary prerequisite for administration effectiveness in all its stages is to implement the results of sociological research on social transformation trends and factors in the system of managerial decision-making. Twenty-five years of ISED T RAS experience clearly show that this principle is relevant, it enjoys great demand and brings actual practical results. It indicates that the system of feedback between society and government, a feedback based on sociological research, provides

extensive information on social well-being, economic situation, and political attitudes, helps evaluate the effectiveness of government economic and social policy more adequately, address the rights and interests of various population groups in the development and implementation of socially important managerial decisions.

Key words: society, sociology, public opinion monitoring, experience of regional studies, public administration efficiency.

The development of domestic sociology can be divided into 3 periods, substituting each other, following the principle of continuity, and, thus, ensuring the evolutionary development of science.

In the Soviet period, often regarded as a stage when science became an “institute of ideological support of the totalitarian regime” [6, p. 3], many important achievements¹ were made. It helped Russian sociology acquire considerable potential, even today playing a significant role “in social renewal of the country and transforming scientific knowledge to economy, policy and culture, adequate to the global trends of civilization development” [6, p. 8]. In the late 1980s – early 1990s the public and political situation required applied research to solve certain problems [6, p. 13]. At that time there was no systematic approach to addressing key development challenges of the country and coordinating sociological research. The pragmatic attitude presupposed allocation of funds to the studies, which results can be used right away [8, 20].

¹ For example, in the Soviet period the foundations of applied sociology were laid (A.K. Gastev, F.R. Dunaevskii, N.A. Vitke, O.A. Ermanskii, P.M. Kerzhentsev, T.I. Zaslavskaya); the first Faculty of Social Sciences with the Department of Sociology headed by P. Sorokin was opened (1919–1920); in the 1960s there was created the Department of Sociology (G.V. Osipov), the Laboratory of Sociological Studies (V.A. Yadov, Y.V. Arutyunyan, R.I. Kosolapov, G.M. Andreeva); in 1989, the Russian Society of Sociologists was established.

Nowadays science and government have largely similar objectives. The phenomena, such as a low level of trust in the authorities, social atomism, social fragmentation, political indifference of broad segments of the population and inertia of civic participation, are “inherited” from the period of “the dashing 1990s”. These problems could have been avoided if the Russians had had the feeling that they could influence the situation in the country, had a voice and that voice could be heard in the highest echelons of power. Modern sociological science is to pursue this mission.

“The coming century, according to the forecasts and conclusions of futurology, should be a century of the scientific worldview triumph, it should present qualitatively new principles and approaches to the organization of the world community focused on unification, to the management of each individual state and society. As you know, the world scientific community regards the 21st century as a “century of social science” [13, p. 9].

Sociological knowledge, describing the relationship between social processes and phenomena, considers a subjective factor of social development, which, according to J.T. Toshchenko, “plays a significant and increasingly important role among the factors determining the content and vector of the changes in the

world and in our country” [19, p. 32]. It is no coincidence that in the modern world “information war plays a much greater role than military force” [18].

It is also evident that the official statistics used by the government to analyze the situation in the country does not give complete information about the second participant in the “dialogue” – society. There are neglected themes, such as people’s mood, their attitude to various spheres of personal and social life and to activities of power structures, underlying causes and possible consequences of social phenomena. Such information can be provided only by sociological science.

Thus, the modern society development vector dictates the need for greater attention on the public opinion in the exercise of public administration. Today, sociology is interested not in the sale of goods and services (as it was in the 1990s), but in “the state and problems of public and group consciousness, readiness of actions (or activities) for the implementation of what is matured in the minds and hearts of people” [20, p. 7].

To obtain objective and profound information about society, it is necessary to carry out sociological monitoring. It is the only way to ensure the systemic nature of acquired information, reflecting the evolution of public opinion in different historical periods and the reaction of various social groups to changes in the country. Surely, only such information will be of real practical benefit for science and administration.

The relevance of monitoring was stressed by T.I. Zaslavskaya even in the early 1990s [7, p. 12], and today this principle remains one

of the main conditions for obtaining objective results. Scientific publications should not be based on the so-called “instant photos” of society, social groups or any particular problem. It is repeatedly stated by J.T. Toshchenko, the chief editor of the Journal “Sociological Studies”, perhaps one of the most authoritative Russian editions devoted to sociology [20, p. 6].

The Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of the RAS is one of those scientific organizations that have practical experience of sociological monitoring of public opinion at the regional level. The leading Russian scientists (*G.V. Osipov, D.S. Lvov, N.M. Rimashevskaya*, etc.) were at the origins of the Institute. No doubt, its staff under the direct supervision of ISED T RAS Director *V.A. Ilyin* has taken pains to create a system of obtaining operational and objective information on the social development dynamics in the Vologda Oblast.

The ISED T RAS sociological studies have always been of regular and complex nature, which importance was emphasized by T.I. Zaslavskaya. They are not limited to the issues of political and socio-economic relations, but they disclose problems of population’s health, territorial peculiarities of living conditions, opportunities and mechanisms of labor potential realization, prospects of civil society development, psychological well-being of population, etc. (*tab. 1*).

The public opinion research in the key challenges of socio-economic policy and the critical problems, the population is concerned with, has been conducted by ISED T RAS since 1995. Every two months 1,500

Table 1. Brief description of sociological research, conducted by ISEDT RAS

Topics of research and main research projects	Year of the beginning of the study	Patent availability
<i>Monitoring of economic situation and social well-being of the population</i>		
Monitoring of economic position and social well-being of the population in the Vologda Oblast	1995	Database of the monitoring of economic situation and social well-being of the population in the Vologda Oblast, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2013620087. Database of the monitoring of economic situation and social well-being of the population in the regions of the Northwestern Federal District, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2012621290.
Monitoring of economic position and social well-being of the population in the Northwestern Federal District regions	2005	
<i>Reproduction of the population of the territory: trends and reserves</i>		
Conditions of healthy generation formation	1995	Database of the monitoring of conditions of healthy generation formation in the Vologda Oblast, 2012, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2012620788.
Monitoring of health of the population	1999	
Monitoring of socio-psychological climate and mental health of the population	2000	
Reproductive health and reproductive potential of the population	2004	
Suicidal behavior of the population	2004	
Social health of the population	2010	
Qualitative demographic changes in the population as an important feature of the demographic crisis	2013	
<i>Management of human capital and innovative development of the territory</i>		
Monitoring of the labor potential quality	1996	Database of the monitoring of the labor potential quality in the Vologda Oblast, 2012, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2012620757 No. 2011614700. Database of the monitoring of study of the conditions for newborn health formation in the Vologda Oblast No. 2015620146.
Labor behavior as a form of individual labor potential realization	2011	
Formation of scientific-education space	2009	
Formation of human capital of the territories	2010	
Institutional analysis of the regional labor market	2010	
Human potential of rural areas	2013	
<i>Socio-cultural modernization in Russia, its state in the country's regions</i>		
Economic behavior of the population (savings, financial, investment, etc.)	2001	Information-analytical system of monitoring of Russian regions modernization levels, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2012661285.
Socio-economic disparities of the region's population	2006	
Socio-cultural portrait of the Vologda Oblast	2008	
<i>Monitoring of living conditions of the population in the city of Vologda</i>	2003	-
<i>Monitoring of the formation of small and medium business in the modern conditions</i>	2002	Database of surveys of small and medium business in the Vologda Oblast, certificate of state registration of a database No. 2012620336 (04.01.2012).

adults are surveyed in 2 cities (Vologda, Cherepovets) and 8 municipal districts (Babaevsky, Velikoustyugsky, Vozhegodsky, Gryazovetsky, Kirillovsky, Nikolsky, Tarnogsky and Sheksninsky; the sampling error does not exceed 3%)².

The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. It helps receive authentic results, primarily due to created comfortable conditions for interviewers and respondents engaged in the direct interaction. The sample size of the study is significant (nearly 9 thousand residents of the region are polled annually), the surveys are frequent (6 times a year), and the range of thematic units we try to cover in each case is wide (the questionnaire includes over 100 questions, combined in more than 10 themes³).

The multilevel research structure of the collection, processing and analysis of data includes employees from the head center (ISEDT RAS), responsible for overall coordination of activities, organization of surveys in the regional center, processing and analysis of information; survey organizers in the districts, coordinating the activities of interviewers and conducting training; and interviewers at each survey point.

² The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportions between urban and rural population; the proportion between the inhabitants of settlements of different types (rural communities, small and medium-sized city); age and sex structure of the adult population.

³ Every new "wave" of the survey brings certain changes to the questionnaire due to the fact that we try to keep our finger on the pulse of events in the country and the region. Therefore, it is rather difficult to provide exact figures on the number of questions and topics.

The monitoring considers the following issues:

1. Population's assessment of the political and economic situation in the country, the region.
2. Population's perception of the urgent problems of modern life.
3. Material situation of the population, socio-economic stratification.
4. Level of consumption and consumer sentiment index (CSI).
5. Social mood and life satisfaction.
6. People's attitude to the politics of power structures, assessment of their activity.
7. Level of social trust in political and social institutions.
8. Level of social tension and potential of social protest.
9. Social capital and potential of civil society development.
10. Assessment of personal security and rule of law.
11. People's attitude to the media.

We should stress that the cross-section of sociological information obtained in the study is analyzed by 14 socio-demographic categories of the population that provides food for scientific thought and important information for the authorities, making managerial decisions. The possibility of studying social well-being and social perception in certain social segments allows ISEDT RAS to supply the authorities with information about the most pressing issues, certain groups are concerned with, and their reactions to different events in the life of the country and the region.

The information-analytical bulletin "The effectiveness of state management in the estimates of population", a form of such representation, has been issued by ISEDT RAS

since 2013 after each new wave of the survey. The Bulletin contains the illustrative material setting out the monitoring stage results and the analysis of dynamics of the public opinion carried out by the Institute staff.

The experience of sociological researches on the territory of the Vologda Oblast received positive evaluation of the academic and governmental structures. In this regard, by the decision of the Section of Economics of the Bureau of the RAS Department for Social Sciences, since 2005 ISEDT RAS has been extending it to the territory of the Northwestern Federal District.

During the monitoring, more than 5,000 people are polled in 10 regions of the Northwestern Federal District (the Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Kaliningrad, Leningrad, Murmansk, Novgorod, Pskov oblasts, the Republic of Karelia, the Komi Republic, Saint-Petersburg)⁴. The sample size for each region is not less than 400 respondents.

The increase in the study area requires substantial organizational changes. So, to conduct surveys in the Northwestern Federal District we use a network of polling centers consisting of the head center (ISEDT RAS)

⁴ For each region the sample size, not less than 400 respondents, provides a high degree of authenticity (sampling error does not exceed 5% at 95% probability) of the information in a certain subject of the Northwestern Federal District and gives an opportunity to make interregional comparisons. The method of a survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. When determining the points of surveys we take into account their equal representativeness in federal election districts; when conducting the surveys in the settlements – their equal representativeness in election districts. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportions between urban and rural population; the proportion between the inhabitants of settlements of different types (rural communities, small and medium-sized city); age and sex structure of the adult population.

and representative offices in oblasts and republics of the region. The polls are based on the same methodology; the representativeness of generalized (whole district) data and data on separate oblasts and republics is ensured.

The geographical coverage influences the subject matter of polls. For example, within the federal district the following problems of the Russian society are studied: social mobility, social and socio-cultural stratification, axiological basis of society, etc.

It would take several monographs to represent all the results of sociological research conducted by ISEDT RAS. This article focuses only on those that we consider most interesting and relevant in terms of social development. The selected themes, in our view, fully demonstrate the quality and depth of the scientific approach, ISEDT RAS uses to study society. They suggest that the long-term support of leading Russian scientists and representatives of regional public authorities was not in vain. After 25 years ISEDT RAS has become a major cell of Russian science at the regional level.

The mechanism to obtain information about the Russian society established in the Vologda Oblast is of systematic, complex, multidimensional nature. It touches upon different sides of social reality, most pressing concerns of the population and the representatives of specific socio-demographic groups. Therefore, J.T. Toshchenko also draws attention to such problems of modern sociological research [20, p. 6], as a “gap between sociological thought and real life” and a lack of “effective combination of theoretical thought with empirical data, an application side of the question”. They are successfully solved in the Vologda Oblast,

as managers and representatives of public organizations refer to the ISED T RAS sociological studies regularly.

The important role of ISED T RAS in the strengthening of regional social science is vividly demonstrated in the conduct of the all-Russian research-to-practice conference “**Society and sociology in modern Russia**”, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the day of sociologist in the Russian Federation (November 13–15, 2014). The leading representatives of Russian sociological science: **G.V. Osipov, M.K. Gorshkov, J.T. Toshchenko, V.V. Fedorov, V.V. Lokosov** and many others participated in the forum.

The system of indicators used in the ISED T RAS monitoring includes dozens of indicators that reflect various aspects of social life. This article presents only key indicators, reflecting trends in social perception and social well-being most vividly.

Each indicator comprises a whole set of issues, more deeply revealing specific aspects of people’s attitude to these phenomena of social reality. For example, assessing the performance of the RF President, we ask people, how successful the RF President is in coping with challenging issues (strengthening Russia’s international standing, protecting democracy and strengthening the citizens’ freedoms, increase in the citizens’ welfare); how prioritized these directions are for the President, in their opinion; how they assess economic policy pursued by public authorities, etc.

Studying the population’s attitude to the regional government, we identify not only the level of support, but also the opinion about the Governor’s initiatives, his/her representation

in the media and how well the head of region copes with the specific problems the population is concerned with, etc.

Most Monitoring indicators, including the key ones, remain unchanged throughout the study period (since 1995), some “secondary” indicators vary depending on the situation prevailing in the country and the region at the time of the survey.

So, to evaluate the dynamic changes in social wellbeing and social perception of the Vologda Oblast residents, ISED T RAS uses 2 types of indicators: integral and (for our purpose let us call them as) “direct”. They are divided by most common methodological feature: integral indicators combine information derived from different questions; “direct” include respondents’ answers to specific questions, which are no less important in terms of reflecting the dynamics of public opinion. To disclose it, we will begin with the presentation of key indicators of the monitoring.

Assessment of authorities’ performance.

The evaluation of the authorities’ activity is not just an attitude to one of the social institutions, including public organizations, the media, the Church, etc. It is the attitude to the chosen course of social development, with the President being the main initiator of trends and the Governor – their main “conductor” in the region. Therefore, of all federal, regional and municipal governments (which are also included in the Monitoring), we pay special attention to assessed activities of the RF President and the Vologda Oblast Governor.

In the Russian society mentality the head of state (whatever this post has been called) has always had a special authority. All hopes

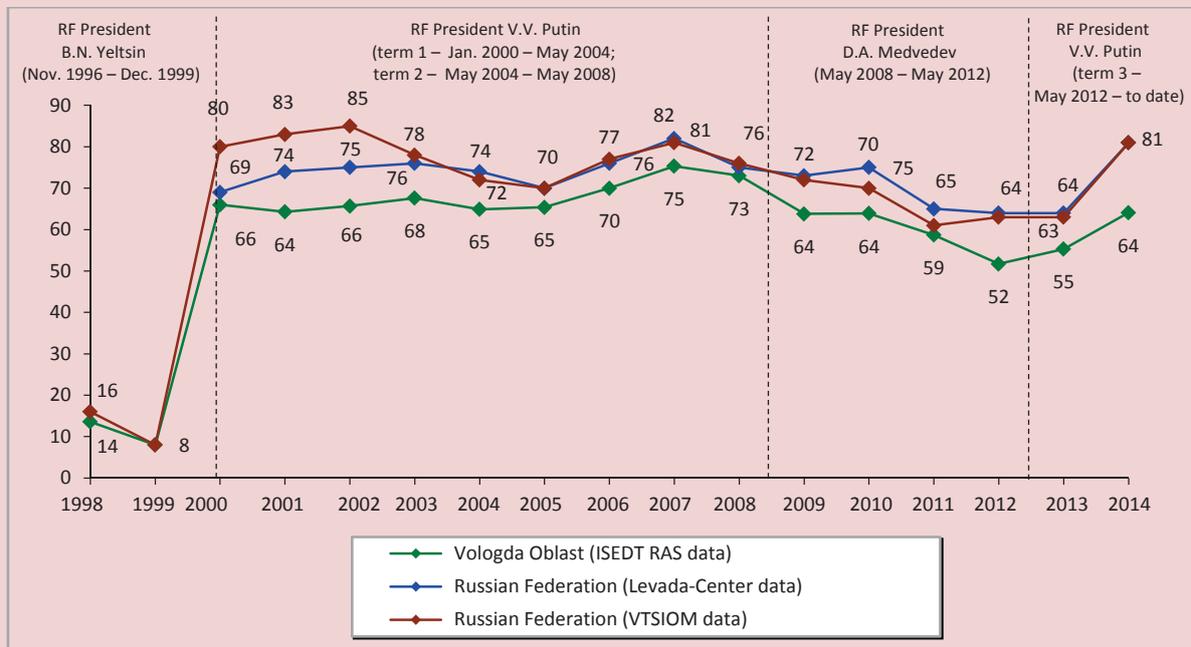
and expectations of the Russians have always been associated with this person, taking responsibility for the course of social development. What to say about the Russians' attitude to the personality of the current RF President V. Putin! The level of public trust, he achieved due his actions in the early 2000s and improved due to successful actions in 2013–2014, was and is out of reach for either of the political figures in the country.

The results of our and all-Russian studies clearly show how dramatic the jump in support of the head of state was in 2000, when V.V. Putin replaced B.N. Yeltsin; how significant the reduction in the level of approval of the President was, when this position was occupied

by D.A. Medvedev, what hope the society placed on the return of V.V. Putin on the eve of his third presidential term; and how great his support was in the difficult geopolitical circumstances related to the events in Ukraine (fig. 1).

Today, the acting RF President has unshakable authority, which can be regarded in two ways: on the one hand, the concentration of the society expectations' on one personality, in our opinion, makes the whole political system of the country a bit vulnerable; but, on the other hand, it has significant potential for reviving consolidation processes, almost destroyed by the authorities' activity in the 1990s.

Figure 1. Level of approval of the RF President's performance, according to VCIOM, Levada-Center, ISED T RAS (as a percentage of the number of respondents)



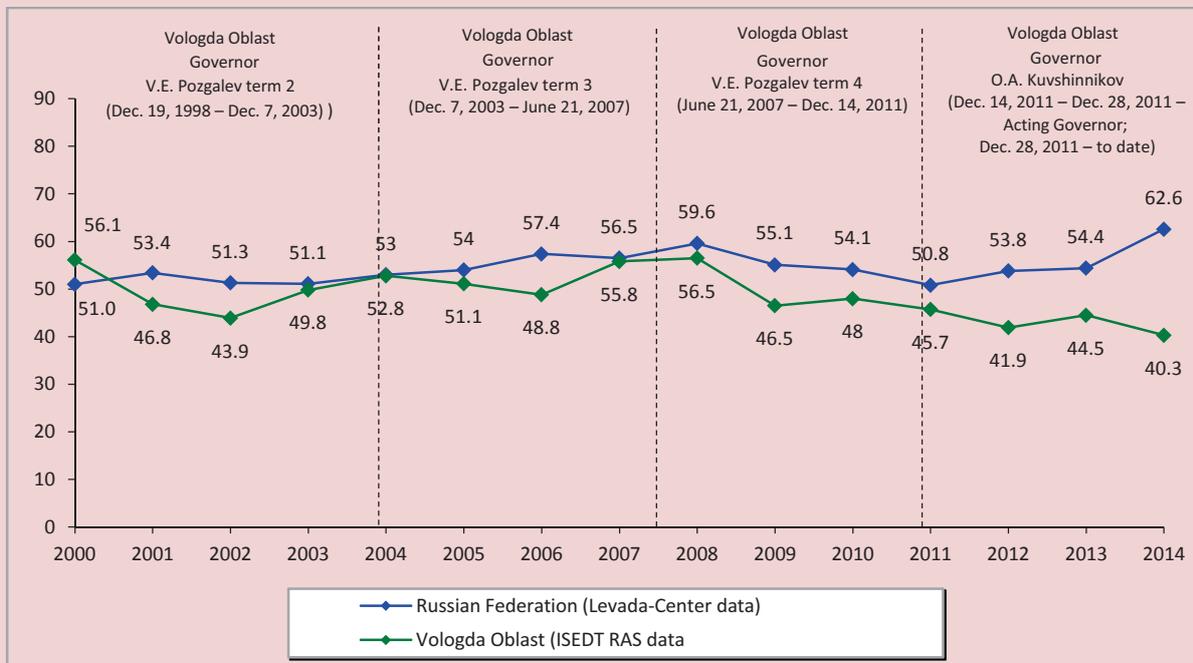
Source: data of the public opinion monitoring conducted by ISED T RAS, VCIOM, Levada-Center.

As for the Vologda Oblast Governor, people's attitude to his activity is not so clear (fig. 2). The high level of trust in the President has an indirect impact on the assessment of local authorities' performance and the attitude to any other political figure. Concentrating their hopes on the personality of the head of state, people are projecting negative aspects of their experience on other institutions, and "every lower link of the power vertical is inferior to the level of approval of the upper. The highest level of public dissatisfaction focuses on local government, which is quite natural, given their familiarity with daily lives of citizens and the possibility to monitor their performance not only on TV" [17, p. 14].

We should not forget that the Vologda Oblast due to its strong dependence on the state of affairs at Severstal was among the first RF subjects that felt the impact of the global financial crisis in 2008. Perhaps, it was one of the main reasons that the ensuing budget crisis of regions affected the economic situation in the region more strongly than in other RF subjects. This cannot but influence the population's attitude to the activities of the Governor's team.

The level of approval of the authorities' performance reflects the population's support at the current time, taking into account certain administrative decisions taken by them. However, one can have different attitudes to the actions of state administration representatives

Figure 2. Level of approval of the performance of the Vologda Oblast Governor and the heads of RF subjects in the country on average according to Levada-Center and ISED T RAS (as a percentage of the number of respondents)



and trust them in principle. Only successive unpopular social decisions can “dent” the level of trust. Therefore, a “deeper” attitude to the government’s performance is reflected by the level of trust.

Without going into details of the dynamic changes in this index (in general, it relates to the trends in the approval level), we note only that in the Russian society the mental factor is still significant, though it, together with the value system, should have been transformed significantly since the 1990s. The state (primarily the President) and the Church are 2 traditional for the Russian society institutes that people trust the most. And if trust in the RF President can be explained by the role of an individual in history (attitude to V.V. Putin) in many respects, trust in the Church reveals the preservation of mental attitudes, which have been “in sleep mode” for the last 20–25 years [5, p. 10].

Hence, the assessment of the authorities’ performance is considered as the most representative indicator reflecting people’s perceptions of conditions of social reality and trends in social development. It only remains to add that we do not rely only on this indicator, analyzing social perception. The estimation of the economic and political situation, people’s attitude to living conditions in a particular area of the municipality, party-political preferences, etc. are considered in the analysis of the public opinion monitoring results, disclosing not only people’s attitude to life conditions, but also to their financial situation.

Consumer sentiment index (CSI). The consumer sentiment index indicates self-estimation of the financial situation; it reflects

not so much people’s perception of the current economic situation in the country and the region and their personal wealth, as their expectations regarding personal development prospects in the near future. The CSI dynamics provides subjective perception of what we have today and tomorrow; this feeling influences real behavior of people. It is this psychological aspect that makes CSI a unique macroeconomic indicator, used by scientists and researchers around the world. Therefore, we consider CSI as one of the key indicator in the public opinion monitoring.

To calculate the index we apply the method developed by the University of Michigan USA in the 1950s (today Levada-Center uses the method as well). It is based on data of the public opinion survey consisted of 5 questions; for each the partial index is calculated (*tab. 2*)⁵. The arithmetic average of partial indices gives the total value of the consumer sentiment index.

The specifics of the CSI construction lies in the fact that microeconomic information helps get a generalized indicator of changes occurring in the economy as a whole. This allows us to identify such relationships of socio-economic changes that are difficult to fix by means of conventional macroeconomic relationships. Hence, the index determines trends in the economic and social situation and reacts to possible changes, forecasting further development of the country and the region.

⁵ To calculate partial indices we subtract the percentage of negative answers from positive, then add 100 to the acquired value not to have negative values. Therefore, fully negative answers would give a total index equal to 0, all positive – 200, their balance – 100, which is neutral, in fact.

Table 2. Questions used for the CSI calculation

No.	Index	Question wording
1.	Index of current personal financial situation	How would you assess your financial situation: is it better or worse than it was a year ago?
2.	Index of expectations of changes in personal welfare	In your opinion, will your financial situation be better or worse or about the same as now in a year?
3.	Index of short-term prospects for the development of the country's economy	In your opinion, will the next 12 months be a good, bad or other time?
4.	Index of long-term prospects for the development of the country's economy	Speaking about the next 5 years, will they be a good, bad or other time?
5.	Index of expediency of purchase of durable goods	Speaking of major purchases for the home, do you think that now is a good or a bad time to buy most of these things?

Figure 3. Dynamics of the consumer sentiment index (CSI) in 1998, 2008 and 2014 (in points)



Here is an example (*fig. 3*): the decrease in CSI preceded the August 1998 default and continued during the first months of the crisis. A similar index change occurred in August 2008, when the population faced the consequences of the global financial crisis. Since June 2014 we have observed a less pronounced, but still negative trend in CSI decline. Since June the index fell from 91 to 84 points, when the Russian economy experienced the effects

of bilateral sanctions, the protracted problems of regional budgets came to a head, the unprecedented fluctuations of the national currency occurred and the fears of another economic crisis began to “force out” patriotic sentiments of social consciousness [2].

Not focusing on the dynamics of partial indices in the CSI structure, we will mention a crucial feature: in the Russian society one generation has faced several large-scale crises

affecting not only the material sphere, but also the deeper layers of social life, that is why the psychological sense of crisis is extremely sharp and affects social perception and social well-being no less than the real situation in the economy.

Thus, the assessment of the authorities' performance and the consumer sentiment index are 2 key indicators, we pay priority attention to, analyzing trends in social perception, dynamics of public opinion about life in the country, the region and the particular settlement. As in the case of evaluation of state administration bodies' performance, besides the consumer sentiment index we consider a number of other indicators: social identity (proportion of residents of the region, subjectively assigning themselves to the categories "poor", "extremely poor", "people with average income" and "rich"); subjective assessment of the actual and the desired level of income; assessment of the personal financial situation and the economic situation in the country and the region. These and many other indicators are measured on a regular basis, analyzed in long-term and short-term dynamics and provided to the authorities for taking into account in the preparation of managerial decisions.

Social mood. If we consider assessment of the authorities' performance as the main indicator of social perception, social mood is the key indicator of social well-being of the population.

Social mood is a critical element of social consciousness emerging as a reaction to the external influence of social objects, as the resulting or dominant feeling generated by these objects, conscious or unconscious [23]. Stressing the importance of this indicator,

J.T. Toshchenko notes that it "is objectively a determining, integrating indicator of the level of welfare, social well-being or disorder, the degree of stability... Social mood as an important feature of social consciousness is involved in the regulation of individual acts, actions of people, social groups, and social institutions, and demonstrates their mindset and attitude, value orientation and paradigms" [19, p. 30].

There are many federal and regional approaches to the understanding of social mood measurement⁶. According to the ISED T RAS method, respondents are encouraged to choose one of four options of answer to the question: How would you assess your mood in recent days?: "great mood", "usual condition, good mode", "I feel stress, anger", "I feel fear, depression". Efficiency, effectiveness and easy measurement of results along with the correlation with national trends in public opinion (see fig. 4) determine the validity of this approach as a representative express-method to study social condition.

The results of our and, and federal studies demonstrate the fact that social mood reflects a general trend of social development. The ups

⁶ VCIOM, for example, constructs an integrated social mood index on the basis of two comprehensive indices: index of social well-being and index of assessment of the situation in the country. Each, in turn, consists of respondents' answers to 3 questions, more deeply revealing their essence. To calculate the index of social well-being the following questions are proposed: "To what extent are you satisfied with the life you lead?"; "What do you think, will you (your family) live better or worse than now in a year?"; "How do you assess the current financial situation in your family?" To calculate the index of assessment of the situation in the country the following questions are asked: "How would you assess the current economic situation in Russia in general?", "How would you evaluate the current political situation in Russia?", "How much do you agree with the fact that things in country are going in the right direction?". The integrated social mood index is the average of all six partial indices.

and downs of social well-being of the Russians almost correspond (with a small time lag) to the periods of stabilization and destabilization of the situation in the country and the world [16, p. 3]. They show that the Russian society is slowly but surely adapting to the social reality conditions changed after the USSR collapse and the stressful period of the 1990s. At the same time, it responds to major events in the life of the country and the region. Not accidentally, the positive dynamics of social mood was interrupted only in 2009, when the Vologda Oblast experienced the consequences of the global financial crisis (and this “collision” was more significant for the oblast than for many other RF subjects). However, the global financial crisis was not comparable to the 1991 and 1998 crises. Thus, the deterioration of social mood was short-term and since 2010 the percentage of people describing their mood as positive has continued to increase (fig. 4).

Certain events in the country affect social mood of all categories of the population, but within socio-demographic groups they manifest themselves in different ways. For example, in the period from February 2014 to August 2015 the history of Russia can be divided into 2 stages. The first stage is associated with the successful performance of the Russian team at the Olympics and the entry of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation. The second stage is connected with the deterioration of the economic situation and material condition of the population, the bilateral sanctions, the fluctuations of the national currency and the aggravation of the protracted budget crisis of the regions.

It seems rather strange, but during this period (2014–2015) mood of “the poor” has improved and of relatively “rich” has worsened (tab. 3). The proportion of those who experience positive emotions has increased among 20% of the poorest by 13 p. p. (from 43 to 56%) and

Figure 4. Proportion of people positively describing their mood in the Russian Federation and the Vologda Oblast (as a percentage of the number of respondents)

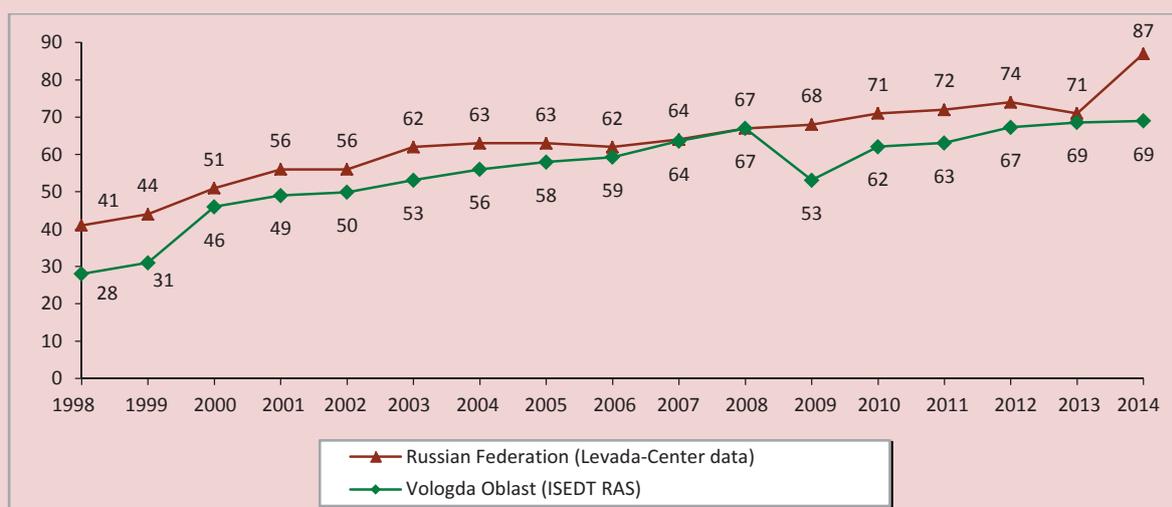


Table 3. How would you assess your mood in recent days? (answer option: "Great mood, normal, usual condition, as a percentage of the number of respondents)

Indicator	Feb. 2014	Apr. 2014	June 2014	Aug. 2014	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2014	Feb. 2015	Apr. 2015	June 2015	Aug. 2015	Dynamics (+/-)	
											Aug. 2015 to Feb. 2015	Aug. 2015 to Feb. 2014
Sex												
Men	65.8	68.5	71.3	69.5	68.8	69.7	61.7	67.4	72.7	75.2	+14	+9
Women	64.4	70.0	71.0	71.4	69.8	72.0	61.9	67.8	66.8	71.3	+9	+7
Age												
Under 30	71.8	70.8	76.1	79.1	76.6	76.4	71.3	73.5	79.4	78.9	+8	+7
30–55	66.4	70.0	71.8	70.3	68.3	69.8	58.3	67.9	67.6	72.1	+14	+6
Over 55	58.6	67.2	66.7	64.9	66.1	69.1	60.7	63.7	65.9	70.8	+10	+12
Education												
Incomplete secondary/secondary	55.6	61.3	61.7	63.3	65.4	67.8	54.8	62.1	64.0	70.2	+15	+15
Secondary vocational	66.0	70.7	72.2	71.3	70.2	71.8	65.2	68.2	73.6	75.3	+10	+9
Incomplete higher/higher	74.1	78.1	80.4	77.7	73.3	73.5	65.8	73.1	70.6	74.1	+8	0
Income groups												
20% of the poorest	43.2	47.4	54.9	54.1	50.2	55.1	38.3	55.6	57.1	55.7	+17	+13
60% of the people with the middle-sized income	68.6	72.6	72.7	71.5	73.5	75.0	65.2	69.2	71.3	77.7	+13	+9
20% of the most prosperous	87.1	82.7	89.0	89.6	79.0	81.6	80.3	78.1	82.5	85.1	+5	-2
Territories												
Vologda	72.3	75.6	78.6	80.7	75.5	75.6	66.4	72.5	75.6	77.9	+12	+6
Cherepovets	76.0	79.0	79.9	76.5	72.8	73.2	63.1	69.8	71.2	74.9	+12	-1
Districts	55.2	60.7	62.3	61.5	64.0	67.1	58.6	63.7	65.1	69.4	+11	+14
Oblast	65.1	69.3	71.1	70.5	69.3	70.9	61.8	67.6	69.5	73.1	+11	+8

declined among 20% of the wealthiest by 2 p.p. (from 87 to 85%). There is an obvious impact of intangible factors: growth in the intensity of consolidation processes, sense of patriotism and pride for the country and its leader and understanding that public opinion is the main indicator of public administration's efficiency, as the RF President stated.

What is social well-being of the Russians today? The answer to this question is pre-

sented in the recent report on the state of Russian society made by the scientists of the Institute of Sociology. We from the perspective of regional researchers can only confirm this characteristic: "Conflicting assessments, which the Russians give to social changes happening today, indicate the uncertainty of trends and prospects of the country's development in the mass consciousness... The social context of transformations

occurring in the country is reflected in the contradictory socio-psychological condition of the population. Slightly more than half of our citizens estimate their emotional state positively, and at the end of 2014 almost half of the Russians give negative assessment of their socio-psychological well-being (a quarter of them felt anxiety, one person in five experienced apathy, irritability, more seldom – anger)” [16, p. 3].

Winding up with our idea of social mood as one of the key indicators of the public opinion monitoring, we want to draw attention to the fact that, besides this indicator, we use other indicators, such as reserves of patience, protest potential, and results of special studies devoted to the public mental health, to analyze dynamic changes in social well-being. Not to “set of” the importance, which we attach to the indicator of social mood, we will not dwell on the analysis of their dynamics in this context. We only note that, in general, they confirm the trends in social well-being that are discussed above and observed not only at the regional, but also at the national level.

Public Sentiment Index (PSI). In 2008 the Institute developed a method to calculate the public sentiment index – a complex indicator, “including” elements of social perception and social well-being.

The public sentiment index consists of 2 sub-indices – index of the attitude to authorities and index of social well-being. Even their names largely reflect the specifics of the issues used to calculate PSI (12 questions are used for the calculation).

The measurement of the public sentiment index was tested on the data of the public opinion monitoring conducted by ISEDT RAS in 10 regions of the Northwestern Federal

District in 2005–2010. According to the calculations, the NWFD-averaged indicator of the integrated index accounted for 108.2 points in 2010, indicating the preponderance of positive evaluations of social mood over negative (*tab. 4*).

Compared to 2005, in the North-West on average and all territories of the district there was a positive dynamics of the integral index. The most significant increase in PSI was recorded in the Arkhangelsk Oblast (by 24 p.p.), the Leningrad Oblast (by 15 p.p.), Saint Petersburg (by 14 p.p.) and the Komi Republic (by 20 p.p.). The first three subjects were characterized by the increase in the index of social well-being and in the Republic of Komi – by the index of attitude to the authorities.

The measurement of the public sentiment index on the territory of the Northwestern Federal District and the Vologda Oblast districts allowed us to get complex assessment of the efficiency of public administration, simultaneously reflecting the dynamics of public opinion about authorities’ performance and the ultimate effectiveness of this activity in the form of self-assessed material situation and social mood.

Thus, the system of indicators used in ISEDT RAS monitoring studies has allowed us to identify the trends in social perception and social well-being of different socio-demographic groups of the Vologda Oblast population for almost 25 years. The obtained information is not only great support for the authorities to make management decisions, but also the reason for the debate in the media, at meetings of the Public Chamber and scientific events organized and participated by the ISEDT RAS staff.

Table 4. Public sentiment index (PSI)

Indices	Territories	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2010 to 2005, +/-
<i>Index of social health</i>	Arkhangelsk Oblast	87.0	107.1	104.8	102.2	113.8	118.1	+31
	Pskov Oblast	–	108.1	114.1	107.6	97.8	117.4	–
	Saint Petersburg	99.0	121.2	123.8	110.1	102.6	117.1	+18
	Leningrad Oblast	96.5	111.8	109.8	114.4	102.0	114.9	+18
	Republic of Karelia	100.0	107.1	111.8	107.0	105.4	113.0	+13
	Novgorod Oblast	–	105.6	100.4	100.9	93.4	107.6	–
	Vologda Oblast	89.5	106.7	111.9	110.7	99.2	104.7	+15
	Murmansk Oblast	96.3	111.1	114.4	108.8	112.1	104.5	+8
	Komi Republic	89.1	102.8	108.4	105.8	95.8	103.7	+15
	Kaliningrad Oblast	90.0	108.0	105.8	110.0	86.2	101.8	+12
	Average for NWFD	93.4	108.9	110.5	107.8	100.8	99.8	+6
<i>Index of attitude to the authorities</i>	Pskov Oblast	–	83.6	102.7	122.8	98.6	118.4	–
	Komi Republic	84.0	95.5	102.3	118.2	97.4	110.4	+26
	Vologda Oblast	105.6	111.9	125.3	136.1	94.0	110.2	+5
	Arkhangelsk Oblast	93.2	95.6	97.4	107.7	99.2	109.7	+17
	Republic of Karelia	97.3	94.7	99.7	121.4	92.3	107.4	+10
	Saint Petersburg	97.0	111.7	109.6	130.4	109.3	107.0	+10
	Leningrad Oblast	92.5	103.4	101.4	132.9	110.6	103.7	+11
	Murmansk Oblast	97.6	107.9	114.9	128.4	98.5	99.9	+2
	Novgorod Oblast	–	97.2	94.6	114.7	93.5	97.2	–
	Kaliningrad Oblast	93.6	110.1	111.8	129.7	100.3	96.1	+3
	Average for NWFD	95.1	101.2	105.9	124.2	99.4	106.0	+11
Integral Public Sentiment Index (PSI)	Pskov Oblast	–	95.9	108.4	115.3	98.2	117.9	–
	Arkhangelsk Oblast	90.1	101.4	101.2	104.7	106.5	113.9	+24
	Saint Petersburg	97.7	116.5	116.7	120.3	106.0	112.1	+14
	Republic of Karelia	98.5	100.9	105.8	114.2	98.9	110.2	+12
	Leningrad Oblast	94.5	107.7	105.6	123.7	106.3	109.3	+15
	Vologda Oblast	97.6	109.3	118.6	123.5	96.6	107.5	+10
	Komi Republic	86.6	99.2	105.4	111.0	96.6	107.0	+20
	Novgorod Oblast	–	101.5	97.6	108.0	93.5	102.4	–
	Murmansk Oblast	96.9	109.5	114.7	118.6	105.3	102.2	+5
	Kaliningrad Oblast	91.6	109.1	108.8	119.9	93.3	99.0	+7
	Average for NWFD	94.2	105.1	108.3	115.9	100.1	108.2	+14

“Scientific understanding of individual and collective social behavior, leading to their control, probably is the most urgent challenge the humanity faces today. Hence, in the current situation only social sciences and humanities, focused on a person, his/her social actions and social reality created by man, can introduce scientific rationality into multi-directional, spontaneous and irresponsible actions of a person, bring them to a common denominator, eliminating and neutralizing global threats, like the sword of Damocles hanging over mankind” [13, p. 11].

Today, the solution of sociology problems greatly affects the quality of state-society relations at all levels of government and the management bodies’ understanding of the real problems the population are concerned with. Therefore, it is very important to use available mechanisms to systematize sociological research. For example, a lot depends on the status of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which can play a role of an “independent institute that coordinates sociological studies, supports promising regional scientific schools and young scientists and seeks for new forms of Russian sociology’s entry in the world science” [8, p. 30]. The federal law “On strategic planning in the Russian Federation” can become an important tool in the integration of sociological knowledge into public administration. It was welcomed by many scientists (E.V. Zhirnel, O.S. Sukharev, A. Wasserman, M. Delyagin, etc.). In fact, it is “a necessary step for the formation of a unified system of strategic planning, covering federal, regional and municipal level” [22, p. 64].

Modern sociological science does not claim to maintain the management system. It is about integration of sociological knowledge into the

structure of the legislative process. As IS RAS Director M.K. Gorshkov noted in his speech, “we got used to a rather easy formula of “sociological maintenance”...but I think it is not enough, we need more a in-depth and serious look at the ways of this interaction. It is not about maintenance, but about real, meaningful inclusion. And not when we have to deal with the drawbacks of managerial decisions, but it is more desirable at the early stages, when the decision is only elaborating... It is about “sociological complicity”, at least we have recently insisted on this term, and I think that in the future we will even need to strengthen it” [3]. Thus, the experience of regional sociological studies conducted by the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of the RAS shows that the system of feedback between the society and the state, expressed by the public opinion monitoring, gives a broad cross section of information on social well-being, the economic situation, and political attitudes of the population. It helps evaluate the effectiveness of state economic and social policy more adequately and consider the rights and interests of various population groups in the development and implementation of socially important managerial decisions.

Today the many-year experience of monitoring allows us to assess the stability of political and economic situation in the country, the level of support of current authorities and their decisions and understand the nature of attitudes. The high level of demand in monitoring results among the authorities and the representatives of science and society, and the informational, organizational, methodological and psychological support are a matter of pride for us and, perhaps, the main indicator of the work conducted for 25 years.

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